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THE TWILIGHT SAINT *

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By

STARK YOUNG

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Stark Young, dramatist and critic, the author of *The Twilight Saint,* was born in Como, Mississippi, on October 11, 1881. He was graduated from the university of his native state and a year later took his master's degree at Columbia University. From 1907 to 1915 he taught at the University of Texas, and from 1915 to 1921 he was professor of English at Amherst College. His travels have taken him to Greece, and to Spain, and to Italy where he has lingered, making a special study of the native drama.

The text of *The Twilight Saint* has undergone revision by the author since its first appearance. It was acted in 1918 with *Madretta,* another of the author's plays, at the dramatic school of the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, under the direction of Thomas Wood Stevens. The author writes: "The only instruction I should like to propose is that the actor of St. Francis keep him very simple, not get him moralizing and long-faced. In Egan's book on St. Francis [1] there is a picture of the preaching to the birds in which Boutet de Monvel shows a Tuscan type that is my idea of the man simplified." The play itself suggests charming by-ways of literature that lead in one direction perhaps to Hewlett's *Earthwork Out of Tuscany* and Josephine Preston Peabody's *The Wolf of Gubbio,* and in another possibly to the Saint's own *Little Flowers,* and *Canticle to the Sun.*

[1] Maurice F. Egan, *Everybody's St. Francis,* with pictures by M. Boutet de Monvel, New York, 1912.

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THE TWILIGHT SAINT

CHARACTERS

GUIDO, *the husband, a young poet.*
LISETTA, *his wife.*
PIA, *a neighbor woman.*
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI.

In the year 1215 A.D.

A room in GUIDO'S *house, on a hillside near Bevagna. It is a poor apartment, clumsily kept. On your left near the front is a bed; on the floor by the bed lie scattered pages of manuscript. A table littered with manuscripts and crockery stands against the back wall of the room to the right. On the right hand wall is a big fireplace with copper vessels and brass. A bench sits by the fireplace and several stools about the room. On the stone flags two sheepskins are spread.*

Through the open door in the middle of the back wall rises the slope of a hill, green with spring and starred with flowers. A stream is visible through the grass and the drowsy sound of the water fills the air. The late yellow sunlight falls through a window over the bed like gilding and floods the hill without.

LISETTA *lies on the bed, still, her eyes closed.* PIA *sits on the ingle bench, halfway in the great fireplace, shelling peas. She is a little peasant woman with a kerchief on her head and a wrinkled face as brown as a nut.*

GUIDO *sits at the table, his face to the wall, his chin on his palm.*

PIA.

Guido, Guido, thou hast not spoke this hour,
Nor read one word nor written aught. Dear Lord,

The lion on the palace at Assisi
Sits not more still in stone! Guido, look thou!

GUIDO [*turning round without looking at her*].
Yes, old Pia, good neighbor.

PIA.
Yes, old Pia! Guido, grieve not so much,
Lisetta will be well before the spring
Comes round again.

GUIDO.
Yes, Lisetta will be well perhaps. God grant!

PIA.
Well, what then?

GUIDO.
'Tis not only of her I think, Pia, here am I
Shut in this house from month to month a nurse;
Here lies she sick, this child, and may not stir;
And I, lacking due means to hire, must serve
The house; while my best self, my soul, my art,
Rust. My soul is scorched with holy thirst,
My temples throb, my veins run fire; but yet,
For all my dim distress and vague desire,
No word, no single song, no verse, has come—
O Blessed God!—stifled with creature needs,
And with necessity about my throat!

PIA.
Thy corner is too hot, the glaring sun
Is yet on the wall.

GUIDO.
'Tis not that sun that maddens me, O Pia!
Can you not see me shrunk? Have you not heard
That other Guido of Perugia
How he is grown? How lately at the feast
That Ugolino, the great cardinal,
Spread at Assisi Easter night, Guido
Read certain of his verses and declaimed
Pages of cursed sonnets to the guests.

PIA.
Young Guido of Perugia, thy friend?

GUIDO.
Yea. And when he ended, came the Duke
Down from the dais to kiss that Guido's hand

Humbly, and said that poesy was king.

PIA.

Madonna, kissed by the Duke!

GUIDO.

And I, O God, I might have honor too
Could I but break this prison where I drudge!

PIA.

Speak low, her sleep is light. Her road is hard
As well as thine. For all this year, since thou
Didst bring her to Rieto here to us,
Hath she lain on her bed, broken with pain,
This child that is thy wife and loveth thee.

GUIDO.

Aye, yes, 'tis true, she loveth me, she loveth me,
And I love her. 'Tis worse—add grief to care,
And Poesy fares worse.

PIA.

And she is grown most pale and still of late.

GUIDO.

Look, Pia, how she lieth there like death,
That far-off patience on her face. Now, now,
Surely I needs must make a song! And yet
I may not; ashes and floor-sweeping clog
My soul within me!

PIA.

Nay, let thy dreams pass. Look thou, how pale!
Dear Lord, how blue her little veins do shine!

GUIDO.

Thou art most kind, good neighbor, to come here
Helping our house. And it is very strange
That when we are so kind we cannot know
The heart also. For in my soul I hear
A bell summoning me always—

PIA.

If I should stew in milk the peas, maybe—
Do you think the child would eat it?

GUIDO.

For thy world is not my world, kind old friend.

PIA.

Why do you not walk, Guido, for a while,
I have an hour yet.

GUIDO.
Then I will go, Pia. But not for long,
I will come back soon enough to my chores, be sure;
Mine is a short tether.
[*He goes out.* LISETTA *on the bed opens her eyes.*]
LISETTA.
Pia.
PIA.
Yes, dear child.
LISETTA.
Pia, turn my pillow, I am stifled.
PIA.
There! Thou hast slept well?
LISETTA.
I have not slept.
PIA.
Holy Virgin, thou hast not slept!
LISETTA.
Pia, think you I did not know? This month
I scarce have slept for thinking on his lot.
I read his fighting soul. Where are his songs,
The great renown that waited him? Down, down,
Struck by the self-same hand that shattered me.
I listen night on night and hear him moan
In his sleep—
PIA.
It is his love for thee, Lisetta.
LISETTA.
The padre from the village hemmed and said
That God had sent me and my sickness here
For Guido's cross to bear, his scourge. They thought
I slept—
PIA.
Thou hast dreamed this, he loveth thee, Lisetta.
LISETTA.
Yea, loveth me somewhat but glory more.
And I would have it so. O Mother of God,
When wilt thou send me death? O Blessed Mother,
I have lain so still!
PIA.
Beware, Lisetta, tempt not God!

LISETTA.
Death is the sister of all them that weep, Pia.
PIA.
Child, child, try thou to sleep.
LISETTA.
For thy sake will I try.
PIA.
Aye, sleep now. I will smooth thy bed.
[PIA *begins to draw up the covers smooth. She stops suddenly to listen.*]
Hist!
LISETTA.
What, good Pia?
PIA.
Footsteps. Look, it is a monk.
[FRANCIS OF ASSISI *comes to the door.*]
FRANCIS.
I have not eaten food this day. Hast thou
Somewhat that I may eat?
PIA.
Alas, poor brother, sit thee here; there's bread
And cheese and lentils, eat thy store. Poor 'tis,
But given in His name.
FRANCIS.
I will eat then and bless thee.
PIA.
He taketh but a crust!
FRANCIS.
It is enough. He that hath eaten long
The bread of the heart hath little hunger in him.
PIA.
Sit thou and rest, poor soul.
FRANCIS.
Nay, I must go on. My daughter, child,
Thou sleepest not for all thy lowered lids.
Tears quiver on thy lashes, hast thou pain?
LISETTA.
The tears of women even in dreams may fall,
Good brother. Wilt thou not bide?
FRANCIS.
I must fare on.

LISETTA.
Aye, aye, the world lies open to thy hand,
But unto me this twelvemonth is a death.
The flesh is dead, and dying lies my soul,
Shrunk like a flower in my fevered hand.
FRANCIS [*he goes over and stands beside the bed*].
My dear.
LISETTA.
I may not see the stars rise on the hills,
Nor tend the flocks at even, nor rise to do
Aught of the small sweet round of duties owed
To him I love; but lie a burden to him,
Calling on death who heareth not.
FRANCIS.
My life hath given me words for thee to hear.
LISETTA.
Surely thy life is peace.
FRANCIS.
There is a life larger than life, that dwells
Invisible from all; whose lack alone
Is death. There in thy soul the stars may rise,
And at the even the gentle thoughts return
To flock the quiet pastures of the mind;
And in the large heart love is all thou owest
For service unto God and thy Beloved.
LISETTA.
Little Brother!
FRANCIS.
May you have God's peace, dear friends. Farewell.

[*He goes out.* PIA *stands a moment wiping her eyes, then returns to shelling the peas. There is a silence for a while.*]

PIA.
Why dost thou look so long upon the door?
LISETTA.
Pia, the spring smiles on the tender grass,
Surely the sun is brighter where he stood.
PIA.
'Tis a glaring sun for twilight.
LISETTA.
Pia, 'twill be the gentlest of all eves.

Surely God sent the brother for my need,
To give His peace.

PIA.

Aye, and my old heart ripens at his words
Like apples in the sun. 'Tis a sweet monk.

LISETTA.

Who is he, think you?

PIA.

One of the Little Poor Men, by his brown.
They are too thin, these brothers, and do lack
Stomach for life. [*She returns to the peas.*] Mark, oh,
'tis merry now
To see the little beggars from their pods
Popping like schoolboys from their shoes in spring!
The season hath been so fine and dry this year
My peas are smaller and must have more work.
Well, well, labor is good, and things made scarce
Are better loved.

LISETTA.

Pia, thou art a good woman.

PIA.

Child, do not make me cry. 'Tis thy pure heart
Deceives thee. Stubborn I am and full of sloth,
And a wicked old thing.

LISETTA.

I would not grieve thee. Pia, 'twas my love
That sees thy goodness better than thyself.

PIA [*hanging the kettle of peas over the coals*].

Lisetta, I see the sky at the chimney top.

[PIA *begins to sing in her sweet, old, cracked voice, as she stirs the pot:*]

Firefly, firefly, come from the shadows,
Twilight is falling over the meadows,
Burn, little garden lamps, flicker and shimmer,
Shine, little meadow stars, twinkle and glimmer,
Firefly, firefly, shine, shine!

LISETTA.

Pia.

PIA.

Yes.

LISETTA.

Pia, come near me here. [PIA *kneels by the bed.*] Can you not see
How much I love? If I could only speak
To him or he to me, Guido, my love!

PIA.

Surely he is beside thee often.

LISETTA.

His hand is near, but not his heart.

PIA.

Nay, child, 'tis Guido's way. He speaks but little.
When I speak to him look what he says,
"Yes, good Pia," 'tis not much.

LISETTA.

Aye, tell me not. On winter nights I lay
Hearing the tree limbs rattle there like hail,
And from the corner eaves the dropping rain
Like big dogs lapping all about—and he
Spoke not to me. He sat beside his taper
But never a line wrote down. Once I had words,
Bright dreams, that shone through him, the same fire shone
Through both, his songs were mine!

PIA.

Yes, thine—rest thee, rest thee!

LISETTA.

But more his, Pia, more his!

PIA.

Aye, his. Wilt thou not eat the broth?

LISETTA.

Not now, good Pia, 'tis not for food I die.
'Tis not for food.

PIA.

Yet thou must eat.

LISETTA.

Wilt thou not read one song of these to me?

PIA.

Close then thine eyes and rest.

[LISETTA *closes her eyes. A shepherd's pipe far-off and faint begins to play; from this on to the end of the play you can hear the shepherd's pipe.* PIA *takes up at random a*

sheet of the manuscripts. She sighs a great sigh, and begins to mimic LISETTA'S *voice.*]

THE BALLAD OF THE RUNNING WATER

O music locked amid the stones,
Beside the—amid the—

LISETTA.

Read on—and thou hast told me day by day
Thou couldst not read.

PIA.

I read from hearing thee from day to day
Repeat the verses.

LISETTA.

Fie! Give them to me here.

[*She takes the paper and holds it in her hands on her breast, and reads without looking at it.*]

O music locked amid the stones,
My love hath spoken like to thee,

Pia, think you—Pia, do you not hear
The mowers and the reapers in the fields
Singing the evening song, and the twilight pipes?
The twilight is the hour when hearts break!
How many lonely twilights will there be
Ere God will spare me?

PIA [*kneeling*].

Hush, child, hush, darling!

[LISETTA *turns her face to the window by the bed.* PIA *strokes her hand and sings softly:*]

Firefly, firefly, come from the shadows—

There!—he is coming now, I hear his steps
Upon the gravel road. Good-night, sweet child,
I'll get me home.

LISETTA.

Pia, good-night once more.

[PIA *slips away.* GUIDO *enters softly. The twilight is gone and the moon falls through the window over the bed. The hill outside is bright with moonlight.*]

GUIDO [*softly*].

Asleep, Lisetta?

LISETTA.

Guido! Ah, I have need of naught, Guido.
Thou needst not leave yet the pleasant air.

GUIDO.
Lisetta, my love, I have been long from thee.
LISETTA.
Let not that trouble thee, my needs are few,
And Pia is most kind.
GUIDO.
So little I may do.
LISETTA.
Thou hast already served to weariness.

[*He kneels beside her bed.*]

GUIDO.
My love, I have been long from thee, but now
I will not leave thee any more. Oh, God,
Let these kisses tell my heart to her.
LISETTA.
Guido, my love, perhaps I dream of thee!
Perhaps God sends a dream to solace me.
GUIDO.
Along the stream I went and where it crossed
Bevagna road—where the chestnut grows, thou knowest—
Lisetta, I saw him.
LISETTA.
Yes, yes, I know, whom sawest thou?
GUIDO.
The brother, Francis of Assisi.
LISETTA.
Guido, sawest thou him?
GUIDO.
Aye, him. There had he stopped to rest, being spent;
And round him came the birds, beating their wings
Upon his cloak and lighting on his arm.
I saw him smile on them and heard him speak!
"My brother birds, little brothers, ye should love God
Who gave you your wings and your bright songs and spread
The soft air for you." He stroked their necks
And blessed them. And then I saw his eyes.
"Father," I cried, "speak thou to me, I faint
Beside my way!"
LISETTA.
Aye, and he said? Guido, what said he?

GUIDO.

"Thou art as one that lieth at the gate
Of Paradise and entereth not. For God
Hath given thee thy soul for its own life,
And not for glory among men."

LISETTA.

Guido!

GUIDO.

Lisetta, from his kind eyes I drank, and knew
How God had magnified my soul through him,
And sent me peace. And I returned to thee;
For here in thee have I my glory.

LISETTA.

Guido, the old spring comes back again. And now
I may speak. Guido, look through my window vines there
Where the stars rise. O Love, I have not slept
For lacking thee. And often have I seen
The moonlight lie like sleep upon the hill,
And in the garden of the sky the moon
Drift like a blown rose, Guido, and yet
I might not speak.

GUIDO.

Thou art my saint and shrine!

LISETTA.

Now shall my dream become thy song again,
And the long twilight be more sweet, Guido!

GUIDO.

I pray thee rest thee now and sleep. Good-night.
My full heart breaks in song; and I will sit
Hearing the blessed saints within my soul,
And will not stir from thee lest thou shouldst wake
When I might not be near to serve thy need.

[*The shepherd pipe far-off and faint is heard playing.*]

[THE CURTAIN.]

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